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United States, Canada Reach Pact on Softwood Lumber Dispute

Agreement ends two-decade trade dispute, officials say

Washington -- The United States and Canada reached a final agreement on softwood lumber July 1, ending a decadeslong trade dispute.

In March, President Bush and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper both expressed their commitment to resolving the dispute over softwood lumber, and the 80-page agreement reached July 1 builds on the basic terms announced on April 27.

U.S. Trade Representative Susan Schwab (USTR) and Canadian Minister of International Trade David Emerson initialed the agreement in Geneva where they were attending World Trade Organization talks. Schwab hailed the pact as an indication of progress on the U.S. trade agenda. "The resolution of this long-standing dispute with our largest trading partner is another achievement for the president's broad trade agenda," she said in a July 1 statement.

U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez also expressed his support for the agreement. "This agreement resolves concerns on both sides of the border and allows us to focus on the larger positive trade relationship binding our two countries," Gutierrez said.

The agreement ends all litigation between the two countries over softwood lumber and allows for unrestricted trade of softwood lumber when prices

United States Mission, Office of Public Affairs, 11 Route de Pregny, 1292 Chambésy

are above $355 per thousand board feet (MBF). It also includes a combination of export charges or volume controls on Canadian exports if the market drops below $355 per MBF.

At issue was the U.S. claim that Canada was giving its sawmills subsidies by not charging them market interest rates to cut lumber on government land. In retaliation, the United States had been collecting tariffs that currently average about 11 percent but have been much higher.

As part of the softwood lumber agreement, most of the $5 billion in duties collected by the United States since 2002 will be returned to Canadian interests. Of the $1 billion that will remain in the United States, the U.S. lumber companies that brought the trade complaints against Canada will receive $500 million, and $450 million will fund initiatives including community assistance for timber-reliant communities, sustainable forestry practices and other forestry initiatives.

The remaining $50 million will be used to establish a binational industry council, with an advisory board composed of representatives from the Canadian and U.S. lumber industries that will work to strengthen and integrate the North American lumber industry, according to the USTR.

Apart from these provisions, the agreement also addresses potential import surges from Canada, provides for effective dispute settlement, requires extensive information exchange and defines special treatment for low- and high-value products, the USTR said.

U.S. and Canadian officials are expected to sign the agreement in August, and it is expected to enter into force in the fall. No U.S. legislation is required to implement the agreement, but the Canadian Parliament must approve the export charge system after parliamentarians resume their duties in September.

Global Positioning System Can Aid Tsunami Detection

NASA-developed software is fast, accurate predictive tool, study finds

Washington – Global Positioning System (GPS) software developed by NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) can determine within minutes whether an earthquake is large enough to generate an oceanwide tsunami, according to a university team of scientists exploring new ways of using the GPS data.

GPS data can determine a large quake's true magnitude within 15 minutes, the team reports, much faster than is possible with other methods. Determination of a quake's actual magnitude is critical to predicting whether a tsunami will be generated, and making that determination rapidly provides additional life-saving moments for authorities to issue alerts to threatened populations.

"Tsunamis travel at jet speed, so warning centers must accurately decide, within minutes, whether to issue alerts," said study co-author Seth Stein, from the Department of Geological Sciences at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. "This has to be done fast enough for the warning to be distributed to authorities in impacted areas so they can implement response plans."

The work led by Geoffrey Blewitt of the Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology and Seismological Laboratory, University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) is described in a June 28 press release from UNR and JPL, developers of the GPS software.

The crushing tsunami of December 2004, caused by a 9.2- or 9.3-magnitude earthquake, has raised global awareness of the need to develop a global tsunami warning system.

The idea that GPS data could be a tool in tsunami warning emerged from GPS measurements examined after the December 2004 event, which showed permanent ground movement of GPS stations -- more than 1 centimeter at a station in India, thousands of kilometers from the Sumatra epicenter.

The new method developed by the Blewitt team works by measuring the time radio signals from GPS satellites arrive at ground stations located in the area surrounding the epicenter of a quake. These data give scientists

a means to calculate how far the stations might move in the earth-shaking event.

In testing the idea, the scientists used NASA's satellite-positioning software to analyze data from 38 GPS stations located at varying distances from the Sumatra quake's epicenter. The software pinpoints a station's precise location to within 7 millimeters (0.3 inches).

The team analyzed the data accumulated within 15 minutes of the December 2004 earthquake. Results indicated most of the permanent ground displacements occurred within a few minutes of the arrival of the first seismic waves. Their analysis inferred a 9.0-magnitude quake, very near the earthquake's final calculated size.

"Modeling earthquakes with GPS requires a robust, real-time ability to predict where GPS satellites are in space with exacting precision, which our software does," said Frank Webb, a JPL geologist. "This technique improves rapid estimates of the true size of great earthquakes and advances real-time tsunami modeling capabilities."

The first predictions of the 2004 quake's magnitude estimated the Sumatra, Indonesia-centered temblor had a magnitude of 8.0. This estimation relied on seismological techniques measuring the first seismic waves recorded, a method that lends itself to underestimation when a quake exceeds a magnitude of 8.5.

The scientists envision using the GPS data in tsunami prediction in addition to seismological measurements of ground movement and ocean buoys, which actually sense the tsunami waves.

The full text of the press release is available on the Web site of the University of Nevada at Reno.: http://www.unr.edu/news/detail.aspx?id=1732

U.S. Using High-Tech Solutions To Maintain Weapons Without Testing

Stockpile Stewardship Program ensures reliability without underground testing

Washington -- After six years of sustained effort, the first nuclear weapon from the aging U.S. stockpile has been refurbished successfully, according to a government agency announcement.

"Our nuclear weapons were never intended to last this long and they were not designed to be taken apart, so it is a credit to our scientists and engineers across the complex who have come together to deliver this unit on time," said Tom D'Agostino, deputy administrator for defense programs with the U.S. Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) in a June 30 public notice.

Many U.S. nuclear weapons were produced in the late 1960s and early 1970s. These weapons were not designed to last indefinitely, and nuclear warheads deteriorate over time, even when kept in storage. No new nuclear weapons have been produced since the end of the Cold War, according to the NNSA statement.

The refurbished weapon, a B61 nuclear bomb, is among the oldest weapons in the nuclear stockpile but remains an important component of U.S. strategic defense for authorized delivery by U.S. and NATO aircraft. The refurbishment will extend the bomb's reliability by 20 years by providing necessary structural restoration. All of the B61s are slated to be refurbished by fiscal year 2009.

The project was completed under NNSA's Stockpile Stewardship Program, which works to maintain a credible nuclear deterrent without conducting underground tests.

The agency uses science-based research to develop solutions to extend the lifetime of a warhead or bomb.

NNSA is a semiautonomous agency within the U.S. Department of Energy. Established by Congress in 2000, it is responsible for enhancing national security through the military application of nuclear science. NNSA maintains and enhances the safety, security, reliability and performance of the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile without nuclear testing, and works to reduce global danger from weapons of mass destruction.

U.S. Grant Intended To Strengthen Legislative Process in Vietnam

Research organization to evaluate current system, suggest improvements

By Cassie Duong
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The United States is providing Vietnam with a grant that will help the country improve its quality of legislative drafting, legal reform processes and rule of law, a June 29 press release from the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi says.

According to the press release, the embassy is providing a $19,640 grant to Vietnam's Center of Research and Consultation on Policy, Law and Development (PLD). The PLD is a nonprofit and nongovernmental research organization that focuses on government policy, law, civil society and community development.

Under this 10-month project, the PLD plans to produce a publication that evaluates the strengths and weaknesses in Vietnam's legislative process and provide suggestions for improvement, including amendments to current laws. The organization also will hold a workshop to present the study's proposals prior to publication, the embassy said.

The project targets lawmakers, government officials, academics, civil society organizations and others interested in legal and judicial reform, the embassy said.

U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam Michael W. Marine and a representative of the PLD signed the funding agreement June 29.

Vietnam needs to revise its lawmaking processes, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) said in its congressional budget justification for fiscal year 2005. The annual report reflects the administration's requests for bilateral foreign economic assistance delivered through USAID.

"Hundreds of existing laws and regulations will need to be amended, new ones put in place, and law enforcement strengthened as the Government of Vietnam [GVN] pursues its roadmap to global integration," the report says. In particular, the GVN "must undertake fundamental reforms in economic, financial, and administrative spheres."

The Vietnamese government "continues to manifest uneven political will to undertake rapid reforms due to concerns that these would lead to social unrest, economic instability, and political upheaval," the report says, adding that legal and regulatory reform "is possibly the greatest challenge" facing the GVN.

USAID has been involved in other efforts to improve Vietnam's legislative process. In September 2005, for example, the agency provided a grant to Vietnam Assistance for the Handicapped, a Virginia-based nongovernmental organization, to bring five Vietnamese legislators and one staff member from the Vietnamese National Assembly's Committee on Social Affairs to the United States to discuss disability legislation and related issues with U.S. officials.

USAID also has provided assistance for Vietnam's efforts to improve the public's ability to access laws and regulations that are in force and comment on drafts that are in development.

For more information on U.S. policies, see Rule of Law.
http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/democracy/rule_of_law.html

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